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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS  
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INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE  
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 000058

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/WE AND NEA/ELA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/15/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [EU](#) [SY](#) [BE](#)

SUBJECT: BELGIUM SUPPORTS EU-SYRIA ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT  
BUT IN NO HURRY

REF: STATE 1985

Classified By: Political-Economic Counselor Richard Eason, reson 1.4(b)  
and (d).

¶1. (C) Poloff delivered reftel demarche requesting delay in approval of an EU-Syria association agreement to Liliane Bloem, Acting Director of the European Affairs Department, on January 12 and to Yves Rogister, a desk officer in the Department for the Middle-East & North Africa, on January 13. Bloem did not commit the GOB to delaying the agreement and placed the matter in the framework of the EU Commission and Council's actions. Nevertheless, she did not give the impression that Belgium is in a hurry to see the agreement approved. She said that the GOB favors doing an association agreement with Syria, which is the last country in the region with which the EU has not concluded such an agreement. Although a "paraf" of the agreement has been prepared, the matter is not on the agenda of the European Council, she said. Timing of its submission for approval is in the hands of the Commission and the EU presidency, which "still have a lot of work to do on it." She said that the issues of support for Hamas and Hezbollah, human rights and non-proliferation all need to be discussed within the Belgian government and in the EU before final approval can be considered. In sum, she said, it is "too early" to talk about the conclusion of the agreement.

¶2. The next day, Rogister was prepared to state the MFA's official position on the EU association agreement with Syria. He said that the GOB wants to use the EU agreement to encourage positive change and integration with the international community in Syria, but that it is "perhaps too early to give rewards" to the Syrian government. He said that the Belgians were disappointed with French President Sarkozy's overtures to Syria on the subject and views them as premature. He added that in the Belgian view, Syria must prove its good will and give positive signals about its intentions. First of all, he said, Syria must demonstrate fairness toward Lebanon and take no action that would spoil the upcoming elections there. He deemed cooperation with the IAEA to be important as well.

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